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# UTAH

## HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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THE COVER *Park City may be the best Utah example of a boom-bust-boom town, thriving today on a more ephemeral commodity than silver—snow. In 1884, one of its boom periods, crews hurriedly built housing for the families of miners. USHS collections.*

*Uintah Basin  
& Indian Reservation*

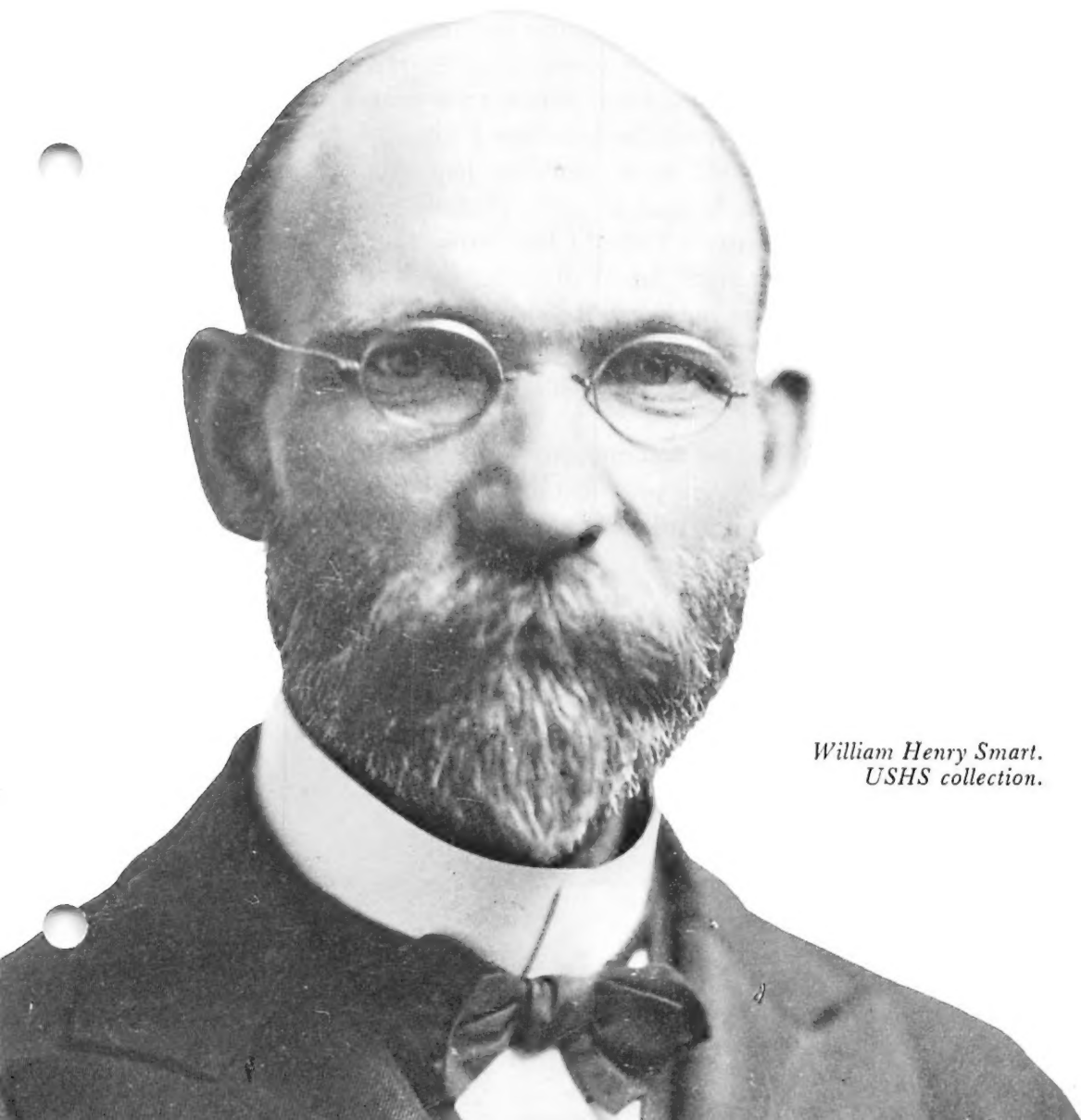
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**William H. Smart,  
Builder in the Basin**

BY WILLIAM B. SMART

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**O**NE OF MY VERY EARLIEST MEMORIES IS OF THE HUGE CANS of honey dad brought home from his trips to Vernal — cans that seemed impossibly heavy for a small boy and that even today strain the shoulder



*William Henry Smart.  
USHS collection.*

and cut into the hand. But I did not know, until I began researching, that one of the men responsible for establishing the honey industry in the Uinta Basin was my grandfather, William H. Smart.

About 1910 grandfather brought a beekeeper, Courtney Turnquist, from Europe with a special strain of bees, and they scattered hives around the Basin. My uncle, Joseph Smart, the only one of grandfather's children still living, remembers that Turnquist was frequently in my grandfather's home. He was a very courtly man, Joseph remembers, who would make the roughneck Uinta Basin kids snicker when he stood to hold my grandmother's chair. So, Uinta Basin honey may be as good a way as any to introduce my grandfather and the land he loved so well and to which he gave his fortune and much of his life.

William H. Smart is little remembered in the Uinta Basin these days. In Vernal the lovely two-story brick home he built, the most imposing home in the Basin at the time and the first with an indoor toilet and a bathtub, has fallen to the wrecking crew. His formal portrait, given by the family to the museum in Vernal a few years ago, was gathering dust in an obscure corner the last time I visited.

Few remember and still fewer care that he established the Uintah Telephone Company in Vernal in 1907, that he was the controlling stockholder and president of Vernal's first bank, that he acquired the *Vernal Express* and brought the Wallace family here to run it -- the same fine family that has published it so successfully since then. He was the moving force in building the first flour mill, the electric power plant, the Vernal waterworks, the Vernal amusement hall, and the Uintah Stake Academy.

All this, and more, he accomplished in the four years he lived in Vernal, from 1906 to 1910, as president of Uintah Stake of the Mormon church. But Vernal was only a small part of the stake that then extended from Strawberry Valley east to the Colorado line -- 130 miles of pinyon and juniper, sage and meadow, river and mountain and gullied valley floor. It was an empire to be built, and he never rested.

On horseback or in his white-top buggy behind his famous white mules, Maude and Molly, he roamed the Basin constantly, from rim to mountain rim, examining timber and water and soil, determining where

towns should be built and then personally seeing that they were built there. Under his direction the towns of Duchesne, Myton, and Randlett were platted in 1905. A year later Roosevelt — originally it was named Dry Gulch — was laid out on land William H. Smart purchased and made available to settlers. There, and again in Duchesne, he repeated the Vernal story, building banks and businesses and whatever else was needed to put those towns on their feet. In Roosevelt he donated land for the Wasatch High School, the seminary, the church meeting house and amusement hall. He led an LDS prayer campaign for approval of school bonds and later went into debt himself to keep it open.

My grandfather believed also in the power of the press. He particularly believed that power should be in Mormon hands, and so in addition to the *Vernal Express* he established or bought newspapers in Duchesne, Roosevelt, and Myton, and placed them in charge of men whose policies and performance he could trust.

Why did he do all this? Certainly not to build his own fortune. He entered the Uinta Basin a wealthy man. He left it a quarter of a century later in near poverty. Despite great organizational genius, and despite his awesome energy, he never prospered personally, partly because whenever he had a good thing going he promptly turned it over to someone else in order to attract good people into the Basin and partly because his trust in those he sought to help was sometimes misplaced.

His efforts to establish a "friendly" bank in Duchesne illustrate the point. Seeing an opportunity to buy out a hostile banker, he found twelve men to invest \$1,000 each to buy the bank. Of course, none of them in that poverty-plagued area had that kind of money or credit, so grandfather borrowed the \$1,000 for each of them, on his own signature, and then put up \$2,500 of his own. Within a year the bank was closed; the seller had used worthless securities to deceive the buyers. Grandfather was philosophical about it; you could expect to be cheated by "outsiders." What he never recorded in his journal but confided later to his son, my father, was that only one of the twelve whose notes he had guaranteed ever paid the debt. Grandfather made good the rest, but he had to sell his stock in the Utah State Bank and in the Beneficial Life Insurance Company to do it.

That was in 1920. Sixty years later, I discovered in his personal papers a letter from one of those twelve men, Owen Bennion. It was dated 1934, fourteen years after the bank closed. Simply and poignantly it expressed the profound respect grandfather earned. It read in part:

Dear President Smart:

For some time I have had your letter of May 10 inclosing note and stock certificate of the defunct Dechesne Bank. I sincerely appreciate your action and sentiments, and realize they are inspired by your implicit faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the injunction, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." . . . If at any time I have anything to pay during our lifetime, I will be very happy to pay it to you. . . . If I do not, I shall always have the knowledge that your love for the Lord and his children is greater than your love for yourself. I realize that I owe to you my greatest education in life and perhaps the greatest example I have ever known of entire sacrifice of self to the Lord's work.

Across the bottom, my grandfather had written: "I forgave him debt of some \$750 in case he can never pay it, he having financial reverses."

William H. Smart's temporal leadership in the Uinta Basin is described in much greater detail in the monograph written by my daughter, Kristen Rogers, which won a Utah State Historical Society bicentennial prize for biography and was published in the winter 1977 *Quarterly*. She describes how he came to spend so much of his life and fortune in the Basin, how he was called in 1901 to leave a prospering livestock business in northern Utah and Idaho and become president of the Wasatch Stake in Heber, how he saw that the Uintah Indian Reservation was to be opened for settlement by whites and recommended to the First Presidency that a good, strong man be called to prepare the way for its settlement by Mormons. He got the assignment himself, of course, and went at it with all his energy. He made three exploring trips by horseback throughout the Basin. He organized a land company, the Wasatch Development Company, and got a government land office established in Vernal. And then, unwisely perhaps, but effectively, he sent a letter to stake presidents throughout the church announcing that, with the blessing of the First Presidency, the Wasatch Stake Presidency stood ready to help Mormons settle on the best lands.

The result was predictable, particularly in 1905, when the Reed Smoot hearings in Congress had fomented such hatred and suspicion and brought the church's image to its lowest point. Charges of "Mormon land-grabbing" filled the press, implicating the First Presidency, to the point that a senior member of the Twelve, John Henry Smith, called my grandfather "insane."

Insane it may have been, but it worked. Most of the settlers on the Indian lands were, indeed, Mormons, and most of the Basin towns still bear that unmistakable Mormon stamp.

Despite the controversy, grandfather did not seem to lose the confidence of the First Presidency. A year later, in 1906, he was called as president of the Uintah Stake and moved to Vernal. In 1910 he was installed as president of the new Duchesne Stake and in 1920 of the new Roosevelt Stake.

This has been the briefest of overviews of the work of William H. Smart in the Uinta Basin. There is a rich lode of history here that someday should be mined and developed into a full-scale biography. But turning now to the man himself. Who was he? What was he? What fires burning in his belly drove him to such effort? What was he trying to prove? Who was he trying to serve?

Somehow, early in life, he got it into his head that he was to be a man of destiny. How else can one explain the fact that beginning at age twenty-four he kept for the rest of his life a journal so detailed, so personal, so complete that at his death it totaled forty-seven volumes and has been described as one of the most important journals in Utah history. From it and from a three-inch file of personal and private papers the portrait emerges of a complex and most remarkable man.

Greatness did not come easily. Throughout much of his life he struggled with bad health. He tormented himself for falling short of what he conceived to be his potential. His worst trial in young adulthood was the tobacco habit which had hooked him so deeply he carried it with him into the mission field and back home again. The journals of his mission in Turkey and Palestine are full of torment — how he fought day after day to abstain, only to buy several packs and spend a day lighting one cigarette on the butt of another. It was not until 1898, at age thirty-six, nearly ten years later, after lengthy fasting and prayer and a special priesthood blessing by Apostle Francis M. Lyman, that he was able to record that he had smoked his last cigarette.

When grandfather was nineteen he submitted himself to a phrenologist for analysis. Among his private papers is the handwritten report. Examining the contours of William's teenage head, the good professor declared, among many other things: "You will not obtrude yourself upon other people, but will stand on your own feet manfully."

The second half of that statement proved true enough, but if ever a false prophecy was uttered, it was the first half. Grandfather spent most of his life obtruding on other people, lecturing them, reshaping them, calling them to repentance, striving constantly to make bad men good and good men better.

For example: When he was twenty-four, he accompanied his father on a genealogical mission to England. There he met a pretty blonde cousin named Nellie. A powerful attraction developed between them. As it happened, she was about to leave with her family to settle in Australia. His journal dwells at length on their tender leave-taking. Her last tearful words to him, he records, were: "I wish I could remain with you forever." And what were his last words to her? "When temptation overtakes you, think of my words." Obtrusive words, indeed, for a twenty-four-year-old.

A few days later, in London, he attended a performance of *The Mikado*, the plot of which he recorded in detail in his journal, as he did that of each book he read or play he watched. As he left the theater, he "talked with two nice-looking girls on the sidewalk to learn how they had fallen to their present state of prostitution." Each told him, in some detail, and one begged him to go home with her. "I told her I had never lain with a woman," he wrote, "and did not intend to until I had married . . . and that if she was willing I would be pleased to have a talk with her but I would not go home with her. She thought this very strange and said she never met anyone like me before. Said she would like to be the wife of such a man." After some more talk — nothing more — he gave her eighteen pence for taking up her time, shook hands, and parted, but not before advising her to discontinue her present life, to go where she was unknown and build a new character.

That was typical of grandfather throughout his life. His journals are full of his efforts to change the lives of those around him. During all the years he ministered in the Basin, no ranch was so isolated it could not expect a visit from President Smart. With apprehension or anticipation, depending on their state of spiritual grace, settlers watched the approach of that white-topped buggy and those white mules, knowing they could expect a searching inquisition and a stern call to repentance.

Usually it worked, and lives *were* changed. One example: One wintry day the visit was to Alva Murdock, a wealthy and influential apostate, at his ranch on Currant Creek. After brief greetings came the uncompromising message: "The time has come for you to get back into the Church and take up your responsibilities." There was still enough daylight left to chop through the ice in Currant Creek and baptize the suddenly repentant backslider, and the next day grandfather set him apart as president of the Currant Creek branch. He served for many years as a much-loved bishop.

That was how grandfather worked with people. A few thoughts, now, on how he worked with money. William Smart made money, lots of it. My examination of his journals and papers reveals no case where he used it other than to help those around him and to build the kingdom.

The land he gave for church and public use in the Uinta Basin has been mentioned, and the businesses he built and turned over to others. A few old-timers still remember the particularly hard winter when the ranchers were caught short of hay, and the price — when you could get it — shot up to \$40 a ton, which no one in that cash-poor land could afford. Grandfather, typically provident, had 300 or 400 tons on hand. He sent out word that anyone — Mormon or Gentile — could have his hay at \$8 a ton, the going price in a normal winter.

But so much of the good that grandfather did with his money was done quietly and privately, strictly following the Biblical injunction not to let one hand know the deeds of the other. Much of what he did, I suppose, has never been known until this day; certainly much of it was entirely new to me as I examined, with growing excitement, his file of private correspondence.

There are letters from John A. Widtsoe expressing love and gratitude to grandfather who urged him to stay in school and financially supported him when otherwise he would have been forced to drop out after the death of his father. What a loss had that great educator and leader not finished his schooling.

There are letters from Widtsoe, then church commissioner of education, and others thanking him for a \$25 gift to the new BYU endowment fund in 1922. It was, Widtsoe wrote, "the first fruit of the appeal made at Conference for endowment funds. . . . It is an honor to have been the first to respond."

There are letters from Heber J. Grant over a number of years and on various subjects but all recalling and expressing profound gratitude for the \$5,000 grandfather gave to rescue the Utah Loan and Trust Company from bankruptcy — a failure, President Grant wrote, that "would have reflected materially upon the good names of Presidents Joseph F. Smith and Francis M. Lyman."

There are letters of thanks from the First Presidency and receipts for monies donated for the purchase of land in Independence, Jackson County, and the redemption of Zion.

There are several letters from B. H. Roberts, heartbreaking letters from Washington, D.C., in the dark days of 1899 when Roberts was



fighting for his seat in Congress. They were letters asking for help. Congress had cut off his salary, his mileage, even his stationery allowance. Grandfather responded with a pledge of \$1,000, \$500 of which was actually loaned in varying installments. Elder Roberts's letters reflect the bitterness of those times. In one, he declined grandfather's invitation, as president of the Eastern States Mission, to speak in New York because

If I attempted [a discourse] there would stand back of it the white-heat of suppressed rage and indignation rolling and tumbling about in the darker recesses of my consciousness. I have to confess that I have not of late entertained the very kindest and most Christian spirit.

In another, following the vote in Congress rejecting him, he wrote:

Of my defeat, I can say nothing. I hoped for better results but hoped in vain. I take it, however, that it is nothing to a man's discredit that he has been overcome by mob law, which is nonetheless real because the mobbing took place in the House of Representatives and under the thin guise of law.

There is in the Roberts correspondence a final letter, dated the following July. Enclosed was a check for \$500. Roberts wrote:

I do not add interest on the amount for the reason that when I suggested that you take a note of me for the amount, you said that smacked too much of the spirit of the world, and was altogether too cold-blooded, and you did not wish the act of brotherly kindness marred by such an act. . . . The interest on the amount shall be paid in my appreciation of your brotherly friendship, and in my prayers to Almighty God for you and for your great consideration of me when truly I was in sore distress and great need.

Finally, in this portrait of a wholly committed man, I must return to the question asked at the outset: What inner fires drove him so relentlessly? The answer is clear: his unshakeable conviction that he was serving God's own church as led by God's own prophet.

That conviction may have wavered briefly the night Joseph F. Smith died and grandfather, as my father remembered, paced the floor all night grieving over the thought of the church in the hands of Heber J. Grant. The doubt quickly vanished and he gave his full loyalty and obedience to this new prophet — though my Uncle Joseph remembers he was once heard to mutter that he could not understand why the Lord would make a *Democrat* head of his church.

Prayer, often accompanied by lengthy periods of fasting, was an intrinsic part of grandfather's decision-making process. His journal re-

cords that in 1886, at age twenty-four, he was counseled by the brethren to marry. He agonized for days over the lack of a suitable prospect, then fasted and prayed for four days, including Thanksgiving Day, to be guided to the right marriage partner. He would never have believed it was mere coincidence that shortly a Miss Anna Haines appeared on a visit to Cache Valley where he was teaching, and two years later became his wife.

Prayer is a thread woven throughout his journals. When he first entered the Uinta Basin, in 1903, he wrote:

We stopped and I went into the timber and offered prayer. I was filled with peculiar feelings as I knelt down here on the divide between the known and the unknown country. I felt a strong sense of responsibility ahead of me and prayed for light and wisdom.

Indelibly imprinted on the mind of his son Joseph was a camping trip at Moon Lake when a summer cloudburst hit. Lightning crackled close and the air smelled like brimstone. Young Joseph found his father, kneeling on an elevation, arms outstretched, face upturned to the rain, praying to his God. Sure that he had seen his father in his most natural environment and posture, the boy slipped quietly away.

And my own childhood memory is sharp of this gaunt old man, completely bald, largely deaf, gold-rimmed glasses on his nose, walking stick in hand, setting out from our home each morning for long walks in the hills above Provo. We dimly understood that somewhere up there he had built an altar and that he was doing more than just walking in the hills. My childish awe of him was far too great to allow questions. But I think I sensed even then, as I know so surely now, the rightness and integrity of this way of closing a life so unreservedly dedicated to its Creator.